

News for Enabling Educators

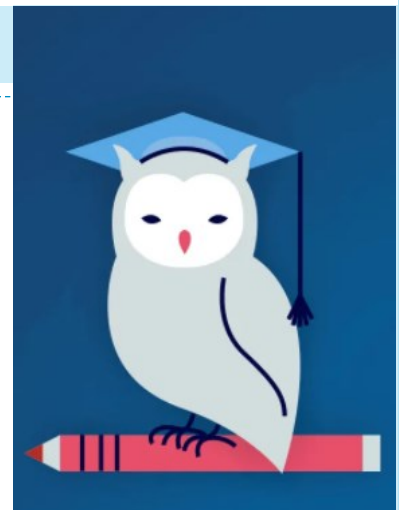
NAEEA CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

Dear Enabling Colleagues,

As we close off the 2023 academic year, it is time to reflect on a challenging twelve months! It is also time to reflect on a year that seems to be offering Enabling education in Australia a brighter future as the Universities Accord rolls out. A heartfelt thank you to those colleagues serving on the NAEEA Executive Committee for the collegiality and shared vision that continued to drive our advocacy throughout 2023. Thank you also to those NAEEA members who offered thoughts on the questions posed by the Accord. I do believe our voice was heard in the collaborative phase of the Accord and it is reassuring to see ourselves in the recommendations. The Accord certainly has equity at its heart which is music to any Enabling educator's ears!

Enabling programs will be important to the future vision of the Accord as one of the top priorities is to encourage more Australians to aspire to university. The target for 2050 is to realise a 55% participation in tertiary study by those aged 25-34 years. This will rely on those currently underrepresented groups venturing into study; however, we know that success won't be realised for this cohort by just opening up more places to them. It will be realised by having those students equipped to manage what university study asks of them. Enabling programs do that as our focus is not only on the required academic skills but also on building students' confidence and belief that they can push through barriers to succeed. We know Enabling programs deliver well prepared students to the undergraduate arena, students who do well, and students who complete.

Recently, five of our NAEEA Executive members attended the FABENZ 2023 Conference in Wellington, New Zealand to deliver one of the keynote presentations. We shared an overview of the significant work we have managed over time, highlighting our contributions to fostering an accessible, inclusive and effective education for all Australians seeking further opportunities through Enabling program participation. This sharing saw our New Zealand colleagues praising the work of NAEEA and what we had achieved in advocating for a more secure future for Enabling programs in Australia. FABENZ 2023 provided the opportunity for us to connect with our colleagues across the ditch after a COVID-induced lull in collaboration and networking. It was an uplifting experience and we reconnected and shared our personal and professional endeavours. I would encourage you to consider attending the 2024 NAEEA Conference to be held in Darwin in December as the ideal platform for reacquainting with colleagues across Australia, and hopefully, further afield.



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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Conference updates
- NAEEA 2023 Small Grant winner
- Update on NAEEA publications

NAEEA CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE (CONTINUED)

Planning for this event is in the initial stages, so watch the space early in 2024. Our NAEEA conferences always prove to be an excellent opportunity for like-minded practitioners to network and discuss important aspects of Enabling education such as policy, practice and research. Importantly, it is a time for us to get to know one another through conversations outside of the presentation sessions.

A highlight for 2023 was the release of the *Benchmarking Australian Enabling Programs for a National Framework of Standards* report. This report evidenced the comparability of curriculum and assessment standards across programs as well as an indication of program course learning outcomes being aligned with those established by NAEEA. It also evidenced the high level of student satisfaction with programs studied. Another highlight, and an indication of the growing strength of NAEEA, is the addition of three more Special Interest Groups. The association now has 11 SIGs, members of which will work to progress more cross-institutional research to support the efficacy of our programs. These SIGs include: Research Development and Collaboration; Enabling Assessment; Enabling Curriculum; Mental Health and Wellbeing; STEM; Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students; Online Learning; Indigenous Students; Diplomas; Self-efficacy and In-School Enabling Programs. I encourage you to join one of these SIGs if you haven't already, to gain value in

networking with colleagues who have shared interests.

On another note, I do hope your team and your institution managed to address the new AI challenge and have benefited from the creativity opportunities the technology has provided. It will be beneficial to come together through the NAEEA Executive in the new year to share how our existing learning and teaching practices may have changed to accommodate this new technology.

In closing, I wish you all the very best with your Enabling endeavours in 2024. As NAEEA continues to expand its reach and influence, we will remain committed to advocating for an inclusive higher education system that embraces diversity and provides opportunity for all who see to improve their lives through further education.

On behalf of the Executive team, I wish you and your loved ones a safe and enjoyable festive season. I do hope you all manage some relaxation after a challenging but fulfilling year.

Many regards
Karen Seary
NAEEA Chairperson

Email: k.seary@cqu.edu.au / Phone: 07 41507067 / 0417309854



2024 NAEAA 7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENABLING EDUCATION (ICEE)



The 7th NAEAA Conference will be hosted by [Charles Darwin University](#) and held at its new \$100 million City campus in early December 2024, from Monday, 2nd to Tuesday, 3rd December 2024.

Potential conference themes include:

- Indigenising the curriculum
- AI in Enabling Education – Disruption and Opportunity
- Digital online and distance learning practice
- Enabling Practice & Pedagogy
- Directions and future focus of Government Policy
- Self-efficacy, student support and well-being (includes first contact)



Above (left): QR code linking to a tourism video about Darwin; Above (right): a photo of the new city campus building (Education and Community precinct) currently under construction.

- Special Interest Group (SIG) – get-together

Details will be made available on the NAEAA website in the new year.



2024 STUDENT SUCCESS CONFERENCE

In 2024, the Students Transitions Achievement Retention & Success Conference ([STARS](#)), Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia ([EPHEA](#)) and NAEAA are joining together to host the 2024 Student Success Conference.

1-3 July 2024
Melbourne

Themes:

- Students
- Transitions
- Achievements
- Retention

- Success

Call for submissions and early bird registration now open.

Submissions deadline: 5pm AEST 4 March 2024

For more information, visit: <https://unistars.org/> or scan the QR code.



2023 NAEAA SMALL GRANTS RECIPIENT

This year the NAEAA received many high quality applications for the 2023 NAEAA small grant.

We are pleased to announce the winner is Kristy Stanwix (Edith Cowan University) for project titled “Empowering enabling students: Bridging the literacy divide through the normalisation of assistive technology.”

Congratulations Kristy!



Above: Kristy Stanwix (ECU)

NAEAA WEBINAR UPDATES



NAEAA provides a webinar series to foster the exchange of ideas and support collaboration and cooperation across the sector.

Sign-up to an upcoming webinar or watch previous webinars on demand – all available on the [NAEAA website](#). Stay tuned to your email or the NAEAA Twitter (@01naeea) for upcoming webinars.

Recent webinar:

- ‘Supporting students to meet learning outcomes: generative AI and assessment in enabling education’.

If you would like to present as part of the webinar series in 2024 or have an idea, contact Fiona Navin (f.navin@ecu.edu.au)

FOUNDATION AND BRIDGING EDUCATORS NEW ZEALAND (FABENZ) 2023 CONFERENCE

Some members of the NAEAA Executive were privileged to attend the FABENZ Conference in beautiful Wellington city from 30th November to 1st December. The conference, themed “Facing Forward: Future Focus for Foundation and Bridging Education” brought together a wealth of knowledge and experience in pathways education and included an inspiring keynote address by Cherie Chu-Fuluifaga and Janice Ikiua-Pasi who presented “From Good to Great: The 10 Habits of phenomenal educators for Pacific learners in New Zealand tertiary education”.

The NAEAA Executive members Karen Seary, Suzi Syme, Charmaine Davis, George Lambrinidis and Trixie James also presented a keynote workshop, titled “NAEEA: A collaborative voice advocating to ensure a secure future for Enabling Education in Australia”, which highlighted the work of the Association. The committee is grateful for this opportunity provided by our FABENZ partners, and particularly conference co-chairs Sonia Fonua and Emily Saavedra.

The two-day conference was warm and inviting, and provided the opportunity for delegates from Australia and New Zealand to discuss the common challenges and opportunities for pathway education. The atmosphere of the conference was summed up in the words of Associate Professor Suzi Syme of Southern Cross University:

I don't think I have ever been to an academic conference where a recommendation for a class activity was to start with a prayer in another language followed by a song. It was typical of the strong Maori presence with their focus on community, spirituality and holistic approaches to education. When I looked around the conference participants, there was clearly strong engagement, sometimes singing too and lots of discussion around how to actively involve our students in meaningful learning experiences. An amazing experience and I came away with many useful ideas to revamp some of our class activities as well as our online modules. Thank you FABENZ!

By [Charmaine Davis](#), Lecturer, USQ College



Above: NAEAA members and conference delegates during networking.

FEEDBACK RECEIVED FROM FABENZ EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

“On behalf of the FABENZ Executive Committee, we would like to again thank you for your contributions to our recent conference. Your sessions were a highlight for many. Comments received as part of our evaluation included:

- Great insight into Australian system with practical tools to implement
- I enjoyed attending Australian-hosted sessions to get a new perspective on how things are run over there (maybe we should visit an Australian conference next year?).
- Networking; particularly learning about what our colleagues in Australia are doing in the 'Enabling Education' space. I loved the interaction with our Australian colleagues. We share so many similar experiences. It was a pleasure meeting you all and we hope the calendars can be put to good use!

Once again, a sincere thank you all for attending and for your contributions towards making our 2023 conference such a success!

Noho ora mai rā (Stay well)”

Below: Karen Seary (NAEEA Chairperson) with former Chairperson of FABENZ Rae Trewartha



5 Above: Members of the NAEAA Executive Committee at the FABENZ 2023 Conference. Left-right: George Lambrinidis, Suzi Syme, Karen Seary, Charmaine Davis, and Trixie James.



A NEW AGENDA FOR PATHWAYS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM 2023

The University of Southern Queensland College hosted the inaugural Pathways and Education Research Colloquium in October at its Springfield campus. The hybrid event was attended by approximately 100 delegates and featured a keynote presentation by Professor Sarah O'Shea, Dean of Graduate Research, and internationally recognised higher education researcher from Charles Sturt University. A panel session also featured Professor O'Shea alongside Professor Karen Nelson, Provost, and Professor Ben Wilson, Head of College for First Nations from the University of Southern Queensland, Karen Seary in her position as Chair of the NAEAA, and Associate Professor Helen Farley from the University of Canterbury. A further 17 presentations across parallel sessions drew together experts in pathways education from across Australia and internationally, providing rich and rewarding insights and discussions for delegates.

The focus of the colloquium was the role of pathways education in Australia's widening participation agenda, featuring presentations about the challenges and opportunities in pathways education, pedagogy and assessment design, STEM education, online engagement, education in correctional centres and student wellbeing and

development. Excitingly, Professor Ian Wells, Head of the University of Southern Queensland College (Pathways) announced the upcoming *Journal of Pathways Education and Research* which will provide an

important research platform for the sector in the future.

By [Charmaine Davis](#), Lecturer, USQ College



Above: Chaired by Charmaine Davis, the panel session included Professor Sarah O'Shea, Professor Karen Nelson, Karen Seary and Professor Ben Wilson, with Associate Professor Helen Farley joining online.



Above: Colloquium delegates engaging with the presentations



Above: Professor Ian Wells, Head of UniSQ College, announces plans for the *Journal of Pathways Education and Research*.

ORACY IN ENABLING EDUCATION – WHAT ARE OUR PRACTICES IN TEACHING ACADEMIC SPEAKING AND LISTENING?

We know that academic reading and writing is fundamental to academic success in higher education, so it is understandably a core part of all enabling education programs across Australia. At the same time, university students are required to interact in class, engage in group work and take part in oral presentations. Academic achievement therefore also depends on students' oral communication. However, academic speaking and listening is not afforded the same level of attention in terms of curriculum, classroom practice and resources.

We are conducting a study to explore enabling educators' understanding, awareness of, and practices in teaching academic speaking and listening.

Known as oracy, academic speaking and listening expectations are often tacit at university, resulting in a situation where students are expected to come to higher education with these capacities as prerequisites. Yet, while 'communication skills' are often proclaimed as graduate attributes by universities, we know little about how prepared students are for engaging in oracy practices when they enter undergraduate study, or how this preparedness impacts on their capacity for engaging in oral communication during their studies.

If some students do not enter their degrees with adequate academic speaking and listening, then this raises questions about the extent to which oracy should be a part of enabling education practices, how it could or should be embedded in enabling curricula, and how speaking and listening scaffold or feature in our enabling assessments. This therefore warrants further exploration.



Above: Photo by Kane Reinholdtson on Unsplash

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Dr Kieran Balloo (University of Southern Queensland) is undertaking a research project (UniSQ HREC Approval number: ETH2023-0662) with Associate Professor Marion Heron (University of Surrey, UK) and Associate Professor Sally Baker (Australian National University) examining academic speaking and listening (referred to as 'oracy' in the project) practices in enabling education.

He is looking for enabling educators to participate in a one-to-one online interview to discuss their understanding, awareness of, and practices in teaching academic speaking and listening (oracy).

Your participation is much appreciated. Please contact Kieran with any questions. To receive a copy of the information sheet or to find out more:

Email: Kieran Balloo – kieran.balloo@unisq.edu.au



By [Dr Kieran Balloo](#) (University of Southern Queensland), [Associate Professor Marion Heron](#) (University of Surrey, UK), and [Associate Professor Sally Baker](#) (Australian National University).

UNISTART FOR SCHOOLS, AN IN-SCHOOL ENABLING COURSE

"I am going to be able to continue to study [at uni] thanks to the program. I am the first person in my family to be able to go to uni and this is a great achievement for me"

explains Kyra Hales, a Year 12 student from Arcadia College, a Gold Coast School that delivers UniStart for Schools.

UniStart for Schools is a partnership between Southern Cross University and participating high schools. This enabling course is designed for Year 12 students who are academically capable of completing university-level study while completing their school studies. The course aims to better prepare current Year 12 students for university study while they are still at school. While many Year 12 students are academically capable, some are not adequately prepared for the rigours of university study. UniStart builds confidence in Year 12 students and equips them with the skills required for future university study.

"UniStart offers a unique and tailored pathway, designed to introduce students to University life while giving them access to the essential skills required to succeed at university. Arcadia College has seen amazing results for our young people both academically and individually"

reports Tahlia McGahey, Principal of Arcadia College (a Gold Coast Special Assistance School)

UniStart for Schools is a dedicated pathway into Southern Cross University. The course is delivered during school, at school and by school-based teachers. Classes are conducted over 15 weeks (delivered during school Terms 2 and 3) and students are required to undertake self-study and complete assessments. The total hours of study are 120 hours (45 hours classes, 75 hours self-study). The course introduces students to the culture of academic enquiry and the conventions of written communication at university, while learning how to balance competing commitments. Students who successfully complete UniStart for Schools and Year 12, gain

direct entry to a Southern Cross University course.

Tai Hood, an educator at Silkwood School commented: *"Through this program, the students have learned valuable skills that will greatly assist them in their university studies. For some, this has provided hope for their future, and we are incredibly grateful for that."*

Kyra reflected, *"without the program and direct entry I would have just found a job and learned the skills from my mum and supported her as much as possible, to help in the background with accounting"*.

Students make up to three visits to a Southern Cross University campus to support their transition to university. Further-

more, UniStart for Schools aims to create a connection between students in our region and SCU, fostering students' sense of belonging while developing their sense of academic agency and ability. Kyra worked very hard in the course, indicating that she liked the challenge it gave her.

"[UniStart] has allowed me to gain access to university and have a better understanding of what is expected of me in my future studies".

Kyra received the highest score in UniStart across all participating schools, and was awarded a Southern Cross University scholarship of \$10 000. Regarding the scholarship, Kyra explains *"it is*

going to help me a lot as I only have my mum in the household and she pays all the bills. I don't have a job either as I struggle with change and social interactions so I have spent my time focusing on finishing Year 12 and will aim to find a part time job once I settle into uni. This scholarship will help relieve the pressure immensely."

We are incredibly proud of Kyra and the other UniStart for Schools students. These students have bright futures ahead of them, and we cannot wait to welcome them to their bachelor studies at Southern Cross University.

By [Dr Johanna Nieuwoudt](#), coordinator of UniStart for Schools, Southern Cross University



Above: Kyra Hales

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: JULIE SHARP (FEDERATION UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA)

Q1: How did you come to work in enabling? How long have you been working in enabling? What were you doing previously?

I have been working in enabling for nine years. When I started, I was working in the TAFE area of Fed Uni in Ballarat, in adult literacy and numeracy, and the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Prior to this, I worked as an EAL and English teacher in secondary schools. After starting full-time work in TAFE, I had the opportunity to teach numeracy in FAST (Fed's enabling course). I have background in mathematics through my undergraduate study and felt confident enough to teach up to Year 10 standard, although it was quite different to my earlier teaching experiences. My work with students from non-English speaking backgrounds meant that I always approached my teaching knowing I would likely need to explain ideas in multiple ways for students to fully understand, and this turned out to be a great approach with enabling students, who often have high levels of maths anxiety. I no longer teach maths (I'm back to my first love, English), but it was a great introduction to the teaching strategies that work well with enabling students.

Q2: What is your current role? Which units/course do you teach?

I have taught Academic Writing in FAST for seven years. For the first 18 months, I coordinated the unit and updated it to work well alongside the other units in the course, then took a break from coordination while I completed my Masters (in creative writing, publishing and editing) and began work on my PhD (which explores the intersection between creative writing, linguistics and speculative fiction.) I will be coordinating the unit again from 2024—a role I am looking forward to, especially with recent developments in technology that are affecting the teaching of writing in a range of contexts.

Q3: What is most rewarding in your role? What is the most challenging?

As most enabling educators would have experienced, students often come to our classes with fixed ideas about their own skills and knowledge. The comment “I'm terrible at English” or “I hate writing” is common, and it takes time for students to believe that learning to write for university is something that they are not only capable of doing but can even do well. One of the first things I say to students at the start of a semester is that I believe every single one of them can improve their writing skills—if they are willing to put in the work. The best reward is seeing “I'm terrible at this” students get to the end of semester and say they are not only more confident about writing, but that they see themselves as writers.

On the flip side, the most pressing challenge, I think, is the development of generative AI, which has interesting (and slightly bewildering) implications for a unit focused on teaching students how to write. The anxiety that many students feel around writing, combined with the pressures on time that all students face, means that asking a computer to write for you is likely to be increasingly tempting. At the same time, adapting assessment to be “AI-proof” is not easy when the purpose of your unit is to teach students to write (and think) academically. Our unit focuses on the writing process, with students developing an essay plan and draft that each receive extensive feedback, which they are expected to incorporate in their final essay submission.

Focusing on the process rather than the finished product goes some way towards lessening the attractiveness of generative AI, but I am very aware that this space is changing rapidly, and we need to proactively work on ensuring that students can build their writing skills and confidence, while at the same time developing an understanding of how to use this new technology in an informed and ethical way.

Q4: How is enabling different to other roles that you hold or have held previously (education/teaching)?

I currently teach into a range of Education and Arts units, including undergraduate writing and postgraduate linguistics and education. Enabling students often require more personalised support, as many are figuring out how to do the “independent learning thing”, and face-to-face classes definitely make a difference for student engagement with this cohort. However, I find it interesting that all my students appreciate the level of feedback I provide on assessments, which comes in part from my background in professional writing and editing. The feedback students receive in Academic Writing is purposely high-level, helping them to think more deeply about both the ideas they are trying to convey and how they are using language to express those ideas (rather than just focusing on fixing writing mechanics). Providing feedback of this type can be time-consuming, but whenever a student takes the time to thank me for useful and detailed feedback, it feels worthwhile—thank goodness for dictation software, which makes this editorial style of feedback feasible.

Q5: What do you think is important for people to know about enabling education?

When I have a conversation with someone outside of the tertiary sector about what I do and I mention Academic Writing or FAST, almost every time I get the comment, “That sounds like a great course, and I (or someone I know) would get so much out of doing that.” The moment people understand what an enabling course can offer, they immediately see the benefit, either for themselves or others, and it would be great to see a higher level of awareness about enabling as an option. So many people think that the only way into university is direct entry from secondary schooling, or else mature age entry long after you've finished school.



Above: Julie Sharp

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: JULIE SHARP (CONTINUED)

Q6: What do you think is important for the future of enabling Education?

I have had more conversations than I can count, both with enabling graduates and those who have taught enabling graduates, about how well these students do in their higher education studies after they have been through FAST. Students realise very quickly that their knowledge of how to write for university (including dreaded referencing!) is often much stronger than those who have come directly from secondary school, and they often end up teaching other students how to navigate the challenges of assessments. Additionally, staff mention that students who have come through FAST are often the best writers in their classes, and their assessments are a joy to read and mark. It would be great if these benefits were more widely known, because these success stories are one of the biggest selling points for enabling.

For the future of enabling more broadly, the developments in generative AI have already raised many questions about the “what, how and why” of our work. I’ve come across numerous media articles that claim the “death of the college/university/academic essay”, which places a subject like Academic Writing in a potentially precarious position. It’s becoming increasingly important to have a clear answer to questions such as, “What are the real benefits of learning to write at a tertiary level?” and “How do we effectively communicate these benefits to students?”

Q7: What do you believe makes you a good enabling educator? What is important to being able to do the job well?

A recurring theme through all the semesters I’ve worked in enabling is the need for patience. Our course runs every semester, which means that the same kinds of challenges appear regularly: students who struggle with becoming independent learners, who have little or no cultural capital to help them navigate the new academic environment, and who come with a range of learning and personal challenges that mean they often don’t understand and need things repeated in multiple ways at multiple times. There’s a balance required, between supporting students enough that they can increase their capacity and self-

belief while allowing them to develop the independence needed for their future academic studies. And with all the patience required, the thing that sustains me is a passion for the subject—I love writing, and I love teaching writing, and it would be hard to continue without that passion. (And a sense of humour helps too!)

Q8: Do you have any memorable moments during your time in enabling?

During one of my first semesters teaching Academic Writing, students completed a reflective writing piece about their experience in the unit (and the course in general). One of the mature age students wrote that she had always viewed herself as being bad at writing and had negative experiences in previous education contexts, but by the end of semester she not only felt confident in her writing ability but had made the mental shift to thinking of herself as a writer who was ready for the coming challenges of study. Every time students express increased confidence in themselves, I’m reminded why enabling courses are so worthwhile.

Q9: What are your future professional goals (related to enabling, or other)?

I am looking forward to again coordinating Academic Writing, in part because of my love of writing but also because I anticipate many interesting conversations with students about the purpose and benefits of writing that the recent technological developments have brought into the spotlight. Thinking about writing as simply a consumable finished product that can be generated as easily by a computer as a person is such a limited view. If new technology can lead students (and staff) to engage in robust discussion about why we ask them to write for study and how writing can help to develop and transform their knowledge, then I see that as a good thing.

Julie Sharp is a Lecturer in Education, Arts & Pathways at Federation University. Story submitted by [Michelle Briede](#), Federation University Australia.

NAEEA MENTAL HEALTH SIG: NEW PUBLICATION ALERT

Looking into the “Dark Mirror”: Autoethnographic Reflections on the Impact of COVID-19 and Change Fatigue on the Wellbeing of Enabling Practitioners is the latest publication from the NAEEA Mental Health SIG. The SIG’s previous research has explored the impact of the high needs of enabling cohorts on educator burnout in non-COVID-19 times (Crawford et al., 2016; Crawford et al., 2018; Olds et al., 2023). This research is an extension of this project, shifting its lens to the COVID-19 pandemic. We posed the research question: *how did supporting non-traditional students in their transition to online learning and university during a global pandemic, impact the wellbeing of practitioners and students?* The aim was to collate the lived experience of those working in a high-needs space in an extremely challenging socio-cultural moment and highlight who carries the weight of supporting enabling student wellbeing in the neoliberal institution. This article draws on reflections of eight practitioners (all women) at six Australian higher education institutions working in teach-

ing, leadership and professional practice within the field of enabling education. The article, published on 11 December 2023, discusses how change fatigue during the pandemic period (and beyond) impacts the wellbeing of these “underrepresented and unacknowledged” enabling practitioners (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 217; See also Eloff et al., 2021; Macqueen et al., 2022).

By [Dr Angela Jones](#), Senior Lecturer Access and Equity, Edith Cowan University.

Jones, A., Hopkins, S., Larsen, A., Lisciandro, J., Olds, A., Westacott, M., Sturniolo-Baker, R., & Subramaniam, J. . (2023). Looking into the “Dark Mirror”: Autoethnographic Reflections on the Impact of COVID-19 and Change Fatigue on the Wellbeing of Enabling Practitioners. *Student Success*, 14(3), 41-52. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2779>

TRANSFORMATIVE STEPS TO OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

From a blue-collar family and dropping out of high school with barely a passing grade in Year 10, Katrina Johnston now has three tertiary degrees, an academic career and a family following in her footsteps - and is passionate about transformative education.

As Associate Lecturer in the School of Access Education at CQUniversity's Bundaberg campus, Mrs Johnston teaches classes in the Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) program, CQU's tertiary enabling course where she began.

Now coming full circle, Mrs Johnston is paving the way for students just like her to create new futures for themselves and is setting them up with the necessary knowledge to tackle undergraduate studies with preparedness.

However, she said it wasn't the future she had initially envisioned.

"Pursuing higher education beyond Year 10 was not conventionally contemplated, and I was convinced I'd never be 'university material', as I struggled with my grades in school," Mrs Johnston said.

"But now I can say that I am a woman who has personally thrived with academia, and along with my own study journey, I've been witness to the transformative power of education through my experience as a teacher - I've seen how STEPS has served as a catalyst to enable individuals to achieve not only their dreams but also to surpass their own expectations, opening doors to previously unimagined possibilities."

The catalyst began for Mrs Johnston when she was a young mother of two, working at a supermarket, packing shelves, when the realisation struck that she did not want to remain in a cycle of manual, underpaid labour, knowing that there had to be other ways to create a more fulfilling future.

"I was working as best as I knew how to help support my family, but I knew there had to be better ways of utilising my time wisely," Mrs Johnston reflected.

"I envisioned being able to study while my children were young and in school, where I'd then be able to position myself for a well-paying job once they reached a level of independence that allowed me to re-enter the workforce."

Now holding a Bachelor of Informatics, Graduate Certificate in Tertiary & Adult Education, and a Master of Information Technology majoring in App Development - all with high-level GPAs - Mrs Johnston has been instilling generational change in the students she teaches as well as within her own family.

Her academic journey has served as testament that in a supportive, thriving educational environment, one can chart onto a successful trajectory.

That single decision to enrol into a university program has unlocked a life of change-making impact and inspiration, with Mrs Johnston's mother, husband, daughter, brother-in-law and many nieces, nephews and friends have since embarked on their own journeys through STEPS and have subsequently pursued a diverse array of degrees.

"Witnessing these transformative journeys has been profoundly gratifying, and I take great pride in serving as a source of inspiration for those in my sphere," Mrs Johnston said.

"Notably, my eldest son, who was merely three years old when I commenced my educational endeavours, has now attained an engineering degree and is successfully established within the industry. The collective growth and achievements of my family have been a source of immense joy, and an awe-inspiring experience as they have unveiled their true potential and progressed towards higher aspirations."

It was the nurturing support, mentorship, and expertise of the

STEPS team that Mrs Johnston said was instrumental in her development as a student - an environment of which Mrs Johnston is passionate in recreating for her own students, fostering growth through rapport from shared experience in overcoming obstacles and barriers to education.

"The connection established with students becomes even more profound when they discern that I, as their instructor, have undergone a similar journey as a mature-aged student, endeavouring to balance familial responsibilities and other commitments while advancing through the

STEPS program and ultimately attaining both an undergraduate and Masters degree," said Mrs Johnston.

"This shared experience fosters a sense of assurance among students, knowing that their struggles and challenges are understood and met with genuine empathy. This assurance serves to motivate and inspire them to believe in their own potential and instills confidence that they too can overcome hurdles and achieve their academic aspirations and effect positive change not only in their lives, but also in the lives of their families.

"Without my venture into higher education, I might still be in a mundane job, devoid of the fulfilment that this role provides me; and I aspire to extend this empowering journey to others, regardless of the obstacles they may face.

"My personal narrative stands as a testament to the transformative power of education in shaping a more rewarding professional and personal life."

By Sala Mkoka, Central Queensland University.

Story & photo originally published here: <https://www.cqu.edu.au/news/1053760/transformative-steps-to-overcoming-obstacles>



Above: CQUniversity Associate Lecturer Katrina Johnston



Spotlight on SIGS

Gen AI

In light of the global emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence, our new Special Interest Group delves into its profound impact on educators and students, particularly within Enabling Education. Exploring transformative enhancements in teaching practices and student learning, we navigate the evolving landscape, considering diverse approaches across institutes and contemplating its educational potential. Join this SIG to stay abreast of this dynamic intersection between technology and learning, actively participating in the ongoing discourse shaping the future of education.



Trixie James is a lecturer within the STEPS program at CQUniversity, a PhD Candidate at the University of Tasmania and is on the executive committee of the National Association of Enabling Educators Australia. Trixie's research interests centre on the support and engagement of under-represented adults in the tertiary sector, with a special interest in student engagement, quality teaching practices, positive psychology and is currently investigating the impact of generative artificial intelligence within the enabling sector. Trixie values the scholarship of learning and teaching and is constantly looking at opportunities to investigate teaching practices through the lens of research.



Dr Grant Andrews is a Lecturer (Teaching Scholar) at SCU College, Southern Cross University on the Gold Coast campus. He teaches into the diploma courses with a focus on foundational academic literacies and critical literacies, and also acts as a course coordinator on various diploma courses. He previously worked at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. His research interests include diversity in educational settings, humanising online pedagogy, and representation and identity in teaching and learning. He is currently researching the use of generative artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT in enabling education contexts.

CALL OUT FOR NEW MEMBERS



When you JOIN A SIG, you join a community of like-minded individuals who can bring about change.

Contact the facilitators below to be a part of this team.

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SHARE YOUR WORK WITH NAEAA COLLEAGUES

Recent additions to our NAEAA website resources include:

Access and Participation

- Davis, C. (2023). Enabling Education in Australia: Emerging Themes and Shared Understandings. In F. F. Padró, J. H. Green, & D. Bull (Eds.), *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (pp. 1-21). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-9553-8_27-2
- Davis, C., & Bull, D. (2023). A Western Agenda for Access and Equity in Higher Education: The Evolution of Widening Participation. In F. F. Padró, J. H. Green, & D. Bull (Eds.), *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (pp. 1-22). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-9553-8_4-1
- Fudge, A., Ulpen, T., Bilic, S., Picard, M., & Carter, C. (2022). Does an educative approach work? a reflective case study of how two Australian higher education Enabling programs support students and staff uphold a responsible culture of academic integrity. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 18(5), 1–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-021-00099-1>
- James, T., Toth, G., Tomlins, M., Kumar B., & Bond, K. (2021). Digital disruption in the COVID-19 era: The impact on learning and students' ability to cope with study in an unknown world. *Student Success*, 12(3), 84–95. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.1784>
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[development-higher-education-re-valuing-higher-15](https://www.herdsa.org.au/publications/conference-proceedings/research-and-development-higher-education-re-valuing-higher-15)

- Stone, C., King, S., & Ronan, C. (2022). They just give us the shiny picture, but I want to know what it's really like: Insights from regional high schools on perceptions of university outreach in South Australia. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education Journal*, 32(3), 73-89. <https://doi.org/10.47381/ajire.v32i3.321>
- Stone, C., King, S., & Ronan, C. (2022). Taking university to the students: Forging connections and inclusion through regional university centres (RUCs). *Student Success Journal*, 13(3), 46-53. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2434>
- Willans, J., McIntosh, S., Seary, K. and Simpson, J. 2006. Shedding past notions of marginalised education: How understanding learning styles can transform perspectives on learning". In J. Mcconachie, M. Singh, P. Danaher, F. Nouwens, & G. Danaher (Eds.), *Doctrina Perpetua: Brokering Change, Promoting Innovation and Transforming Marginalisation in University Learning and Teaching*. CQUniversity. https://acquire.cqu.edu.au/articles/chapter/Shedding_past_notions_of_marginalised_education_how_understanding_learning_styles_can_transform_perspectives_on_learning/13411418

Equity and Diversity

- Bilic, S., & Thai, T. (2023). "One day I will make it to university": students from refugee backgrounds in university pathway programs. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 22 (4), 217-241. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.4.13>
- Braund, A., James, T., Johnston, K., & Mullaney, L. (2022). Survival narratives from single mothers in an enabling program: 'Just hope you don't get sick and live off caffeine'. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 62 (2).
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Transitions

- James, T., & Seary, K. (2019). Why aren't they attending class like they are supposed to? A review into students' perception of the value of class attendance. *Student Success*, 10(1), 115-129. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.v10i1.1111>
- Keys, N. and D. Heck (2023). "Positioning and repositioning in higher education: first year students engaging with the world." *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-14. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2023.2257733>



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Transitions (continued)

- Larsen, A., & James, T. (2022). A sense of belonging in Australian higher education: the significance of self-efficacy and the student-educator relationship. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 19(4). <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol19/iss4/05>
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- Richardson, A., King, S., Olds, T, Parfitt, G., & Chiera, B. (2019). Study and life: How first year university students use their time. *Student Success*, 10(1), 17-31. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.v10i1.437>
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Enabling Pedagogy and Curriculum

- James, T., Griffin, H., Johnston, K. S., & Armstrong, F. (2023). Reflective minds, brighter futures: empowering critical reflection with a guided instructional model. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 20(6).

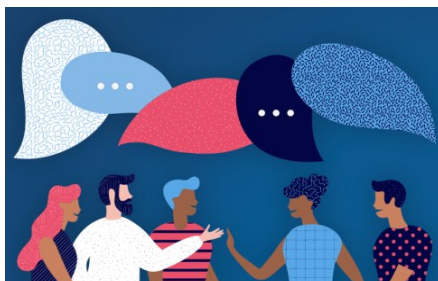
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Student and staff wellbeing:

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SHARE YOUR UNIVERSITY'S ENABLING EDUCATION EVENTS, SUCCESSES AND INNOVATIONS

The NAEAA newsletter focuses on the achievements of students and staff in our sector, and on innovations that continue to foster the ongoing development of Enabling education. The newsletter is published twice a year. If you have a story you would like to include in the next edition, please contact admin@enablingeducators.org. We would love to hear about your programs, projects, research, students and educators.



NAEAA MEMBERSHIP 2024

Visit the website for details at <https://enablingeducators.org/> or contact the NAEAA Executive at admin@enablingeducators.org for details about your membership. Please renew your membership for the 2024 calendar year by 1 July 2024.

Members receive many perks including discounted conference registration rates and opportunities to apply for small grants.

'INVITE A FRIEND'

If you have a colleague who is interested in enabling education but is not yet a NAEAA member, please feel free to share this newsletter with them. We would love to welcome new members and we hope to see many of you, both new and long-term members, at this year's long awaited conference!

ABOUT NAEAA

The National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia represents enabling educators and practitioners from across the country for the purpose of collaborating on issues of common interest and relevance to enable education and the students whose lives are changed through access to tertiary education.

For more information about the Association, contact admin@enablingeducators.org or visit our website at <https://enablingeducators.org/>

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